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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 1405
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1450
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1420
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1339
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1263
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1047
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SUBJECT: OSCE CHAIRMAN DE GUCHT BRIEFLY VISITS DUSHANBE

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.
Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: Visiting OSCE Chairman-in-Office de Gucht raised the draft NGO and religion laws with President Rahmonov, pressed for BBC to be re-registered for FM broadcasts in Dushanbe, and discussed prison conditions. During a briefing for OSCE member ambassadors, de Gucht told the Uzbek Ambassador OSCE will never compromise its support for human rights. END SUMMARY.

13. (U) OSCE Center Dushanbe arranged for visiting Chairman in Office (CiO) Karel de Gucht to brief ambassadors of OSCE member countries March 30. De Gucht had just meet separately with Foreign Minister Nazarov and President Rahmonov, and planned a brief meeting with members of civil society before an afternoon departure for Afghanistan.

14. (U) De Gucht said the goals for his visit were 1) to visit the OSCE Center and meet the staff; 2) to introduce his CiO priorities, including better equilibrium among the OSCE's three dimensions; and 3) to press for a more open society, progress on the path toward democracy, and free and fair elections.

"WE WILL NOT COMPROMISE ON HUMAN RIGHTS"

15. (SBU) During the very brief question-and-answer period, the Uzbek Ambassador asked if de Gucht planned during his chairmanship to do anything to respond to the CIS recommendation from at least two years ago that OSCE decrease its "obsession with human rights" and do a better job of balancing the three

dimensions. De Gucht replied firmly that he is willing to be flexible, taking into account that democracy is a process and that each country has its own reality, but he will be guided by OSCE's clear principles that must be observed, including the independence of its component elements like ODHIR. He added, "Yes, OSCE needs to change, but the CIS countries need to change, too. More equal attention to OSCE's three dimensions means greater attention to the other two dimensions, not less attention to democracy and human rights. OSCE will never compromise its support for human rights."

NGO LAW - NOT UNTIL NEXT YEAR

16. (SBU) De Gucht said one of his strongest talking points with both Foreign Minister Nazarov and President Rahmonov had been about the proposed new NGO law. He said he cannot understand why this has become an issue in Tajikistan and several other CIS countries. It's a highly retrograde movement that violates CIS countries' OSCE commitments. Restricting or interfering with the work of NGOs is "unacceptable." De Gucht said President Rahmonov assured him Parliament will not consider a new NGO law until after the November presidential election.

RELIGION LAW - UNDER INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

17. (SBU) Responding to a question by the Ambassador, de Gucht said he also raised the current draft of the new religion law. OSCE Head of Mission Couanon added OSCE Dushanbe is meeting with all confessional groups in Tajikistan and has already sent the draft law to OSCE experts for review and comment. Swiss Cooperation Office Head Zuest noted a parliamentary committee in Berne is reviewing the law and plans to send its commentary directly to President Rahmonov.

BBC WILL BE REGISTERED, BUT MUST SUBMIT ITS DOCUMENTS

18. (SBU) Another point de Gucht said he raised was

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re-registration of BBC to resume FM broadcasts in Dushanbe. President Rahmonov assured him as soon as the Ministry of Communications receives BBC's re-registration documents, it will be back on the air "the next day." De Gucht said Foreign Minister Nazarov had harrumphed that he himself could fill out the forms overnight and cannot understand what's taking BBC so long. UK Charge d'affaires Belof, looking embarrassed, explained that BBC had taken some time to decide whether it should give in to the demand to re-register, and then had to call a full meeting of the BBC board of directors to discuss the matter, but hoped to submit its re-registration package by the end of April.

PRISONS NEED HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

19. (SBU) De Gucht briefed he also raised prison conditions. The Ambassador noted the United States is considering whether some of its medical assistance can be used for prisons, and added international assistance could perhaps begin to pry open the door of the Tajik prison system for the International Committee of the Red Cross. Swedish Charge d'affaires Lagus noted the Swedish International Development Agency is considering humanitarian assistance for Tajik prisons. De Gucht suggested OSCE Dushanbe could become the coordination point for prison assistance.

HOAGLAND